International Social Work

http://isw.sagepub.com/

Working with violent men from a feminist social work perspective

Joan Orme, Lena Dominelli and Audrey Mullender

International Social Work 2000 43: 89

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://isw.sagepub.com/content/43/1/89

Published by:

http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:

International Association of Schools of Social Work

International Council of Social Welfare

International Federation of Social Workers

Additional services and information for *International Social Work* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://isw.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://isw.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

International Social Work 43(1): 89–105

Sage Publications: London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi
0020-8728[200001]43:1;89–105; 010523

Working with violent men from a feminist social work perspective

Joan Orme, Lena Dominelli and Audrey Mullender

The suggestion that women should work with men who have oppressed women by the use of violence in their personal relationships is controversial. In the UK, for more than two decades feminists have drawn attention to the consequences of male violence for women. In working with survivors of domestic violence, the emphasis has been on woman-centred practice which makes women safe and empowers them to make decisions about leaving the violent relationship. While priority has to be given to such interventions, to work only in this way does not address the main problem, male violence.

This article begins by examining why work should be undertaken with violent men, providing a theoretical analysis of male violence from a feminist perspective. Arguments for and against women's involvement in work with men are discussed, and ways in which the work can be handled are considered. The conclusion is that group work which draws on feminist insights and practice is the most productive way forward.

Why work with violent men?

The position that all men are violent, or have the potential to be violent, towards women and that women are non-violent, sets men apart from women, suggesting that there is something essentially

Joan Orme is Reader is Social Work Studies, and **Lena Dominelli** is Professor of Social and Community Development, University of Southampton, Southampton S017 1BJ, UK. **Audrey Mullender** is Professor of Social Work, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK. [email: orme@socsci.soton.ac.uk]

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

different about men which makes them violent. Such a stance contributes to a debate which, in the first instance, has privileged the position of men and the continuation of patriarchy (Storr, 1968), and in the second has led to radical and separatist feminist approaches which accept a set of dualities of male/female characteristics, but attempt to privilege the female (Daly, 1978).

However, both positions are challenged by the capacity for women to be violent (Orme, 1994) and the existence of non-violent men, or at least men who have not resorted to violence in their personal relationships (Segal, 1987). This has led to explanations of violent behaviour other than its innateness in males which see masculinity and femininity as the result of socialization or social construction.

For example, feminist analyses have highlighted women's socialization into a 'femininity' which is caring, passive, acquiescent and non-violent (Gilligan, 1993), but which may have militated against women. Privileging peacefulness may have made women suppress their own aggression and anger (Gordon, 1989). Femininity copes with, and survives the consequences of, violence without necessarily resorting to violent acts, but such behaviour has led to expectations of women's tolerance of men's violence which has meant that social work has focused on women and their reactions to violence, rather than on the violent behaviour of men.

A more positive approach is to recognize that the capacity for change exists and provides opportunities to modify and control the behaviour. This is not to imply that violent men require sympathy and understanding, or need to be 'managed' by their partners to avoid violence and abuse. To do so would be to treat them as lacking in autonomy and individual agency, unable to take responsibility for their own actions. Women are subject to pressures, but do not resort to similar behaviour, and if women can function without resorting to violence, then non-violence is an option for men.

However, if social work is to intervene in situations of violence, focusing on male behaviour, then there has to be some rationale for the intervention. Because not all men commit acts of domestic violence, explanations of male violence to their partners can become framed in terms of individual pathology, into unhelpful distinctions between typical and aberrant males (Liddle, 1989). For example, studies which appear to justify male violence as a direct result of experiencing abuse when young, or related to unemployment, underemployment or social isolation, while attractive to

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

social work, might be seen to excuse male violent behaviour, or at least explain the aberrance. They imply victim status for the perpetrators of violent acts and are dependent upon an analysis, or set of expectations, which might not prescribe what is naturally male, but outline what is normally male and give explanations for those who do not conform to the norm (Segal, 1990). If the construction of masculinity is being used as a justification or rationalization of male behaviour it becomes a relevant site for social work intervention.

The reasons for this are threefold. First, the relationship of the individual to their environment is a legitimate focus for social work. Early feminist analysis of social work practice rejected individualized approaches because they pathologized women and men, blaming them for their circumstances (Wilson, 1980; Hanmer and Statham, 1988). In privileging women's personal experience, feminism has stimulated new approaches to theories and methods of intervention which can be applied to work with men (Orme, 1998).

Second, feminist thought has celebrated difference, and social workers work with difference. To argue that men behave in a particular way because it achieves dominance and maintains the power of patriarchy, does not acknowledge the differential experiences of males within different cultures. If it is possible, and desirable, to argue for different constructions of femininity, or to challenge stereotypical assumptions which oppress and degrade women, then it is possible to accept challenges to gendered assumptions of masculinity, a hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; Liddle, 1989).

This hegemonic masculinity recognizes that woman abuse occurs in all social classes, but that it is differently perceived or understood by social workers. Studies which suggest that it is more likely to occur in low-income families, or families where the husband is unemployed, because employment 'authorizes' patriarchal power, evade the suggestion that masculinity depends on the demarcation of public and private responsibility (Messerschmidt, 1993). For example, working-class and/or unemployed men are considered more violent because they do not conform, they 'lack traditional resources for constructing their masculinity' (Messerschmidt, 1993: 149). They cannot exercise power in ways which are approved by hegemonic masculinity; they resort to violence. However, caution must be exercised with such studies, because it may be that unemployed men are more likely to be dependent upon state institutions than men from other socio-economic groups and as such have their

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

personal circumstances and behaviour more open to public view. This is not to condone their violent behaviour, but to draw attention to the different manifestations and interpretations of this behaviour according to class, colour, culture and ethnic background. This is particularly important for international perspectives of domestic violence, where differences have to be valorized but global social work values upheld.

It is for this reason that feminism argues that ideas and practices that are oppressive to women have to be recognized and challenged by social work practice. Identifying masculinity or masculinities as comprising, or being dependent upon, violence to maintain power, domination or control, is to treat both the domination, and the use of violence to maintain it, as the norm. Women experience domestic violence as coercive, oppressive and therefore aberrant. To have it accepted as normative does not help their self-perception, or their need to escape the relationship or to have the behaviour changed (Stanko, 1985).

The internalization of relations of domination, or the experience of oppression, relies on three elements of oppression. Personal sexism includes the misogynist beliefs and prejudices individual men hold; institutional sexism involves the belittling of women and their achievements through daily routines, policy and practice; and cultural sexism reflects the socially accepted values and norms which justify the subordination of women to men. Sexism can be defined as the presumed right of men to dominate women (Lorde, 1984). Hegemonic masculinity's drive to assert and legitimate men's needs above those of others and enforce these as the only ones which are of interest, underpins the dynamics which affirm the subordination of women, but also of some men (Hearn, 1987; Brittan, 1989). It is for this reason that social workers should work with violent men.

However, it could be argued that to work with men is to problematize them, to pathologize them in a way that feminists have argued against in connection with women. More positively, to work with men, perceiving them as constructed by economic inequalities, acknowledges human agency, and recognizes that men have a choice: they can act or respond in different ways, they can opt to be non-violent. This is particularly important if working with the experiences of individual men reveals that their behaviour reflects an 'emotional, psychological and bodily investment in hegemonic masculinity as a way of being' (Liddle, 1989: 772). If such an investment is, as Liddle claims, 'accompanied by a degree of uncer-

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

tainty, tenuousness and ambivalence which is quite incompatible with the sort of unitary ''male personality''', then it may be possible to work with these uncertainties and ambivalences.

Social workers can and do work with men, as offenders, as users of mental health services and as members of families experiencing problems which are the focus for social work intervention, most often to do with children. However, such work, while focusing on masculine acts (e.g. abuse, offending and violence), rarely examines masculinity and in situations of domestic violence it is often women and children who are at the centre of social workers' attention and concern.

The arguments for working with violent men put by women therefore rest on the proposition that it is in women's longer-term interests to have work aimed at changing the behaviour of violent men (Dominelli and McLeod, 1989). Such changes involve the re-education of men in ways that promote behaviour capable of enhancing women's well-being. Unless men work on their behaviour, the incentive for men to change will be absent and little will be done by men spontaneously. But if working with violent men is seen as a legitimate project for social work, who should undertake the work?

Who should undertake the work with violent men?

Feminists who give a rationale for working with men might be seen to be arguing that women should do this work. However, requiring women to work with violent men could be seen to put them once more into the role of nurturing men, often with little in return for their efforts (MacKinnon, 1989). That the oppressed should continue to service the oppressor is considered by some to be inimical to women's interests. Why should women expend their energies on men who already receive a disproportionate share of social resources, when there is continuing work to be done with women to repair the damage done to them by men (Hanmer, 1977)? There have been instances of men's groups working with perpetrators of domestic violence receiving substantial resources to carry out their activities whilst Women's Aid refuges which provide services to the majority of women seeking to escape assaultive men are so critically underfunded that their continuation is in jeopardy (Mullender, 1996).

To avoid this, work with abusers should only ever be one plank of a co-ordinated and structured approach to the problem of male

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

violence towards women in intimate relationships, and to advocate such work means arguing for additional resources, not redistribution. Women who have been abused need as much or more help than their abusers: empowerment groups and advocacy services for women (over and above emergency services), running alongside a men's programme, are a minimum expectation. As long as work in the field of domestic violence is underfunded then there will be a tension between the need to work with men and women, and the need to protect will be compelling. However, if work is only undertaken with women then this will mean that they continue to be held responsible for men's behaviour while nothing is done to change that behaviour.

There can, however, be no clear choices about the combination of workers to be involved in this work. Increasingly in group work there are assumptions about male/female working partnerships, but such partnerships can leave the woman exposed and require excellent preparation. The involvement of women or of male co-workers as working pairings brings different sets of issues.

If women are to work with violent men, then they should have a choice, and agencies should not force them into doing this work (Perrott, 1994). But women cannot be guaranteed the right to exercise choice in this matter. Women probation officers, for example, have reported instances of women who have expressed the opinion of not wishing to work with violent men being allocated these 'clients' by their managers, and those who have maintained a stance of not working with violent men, for reasons of safety or personal preference, have found their promotion prospects damaged because their managers deem them unable to undertake the whole range of tasks their post requires. In circumstances in which their professional competence is being questioned, women may feel compelled to work with 'clients' who threaten their physical and emotional safety in order to avoid being labelled inadequate (Dominelli, 1991).

If all men have the capacity to be violent, then there are staff members who are perpetrators of violence to women, and those who are survivors of this violence. For either group, there will be resonances and, more particularly, the intervention might well be oppressive. For example, Perrott illustrates from her contact with female probation officers that women working with male abusers may become the subject of their fantasies, and those working with male colleagues in groups of abusers may find themselves the sole defender of women and children (Perrott, 1994). This is particularly

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

so when 'owning' or confronting the offence involves reciting (and perhaps reliving) the violence that was perpetrated. She concludes that feminist workers who consider male violence to be a male problem to be resolved by men will feel compromised by having to work with perpetrators on an individual basis, or in groups.

Moreover, women who work with violent offenders have to be supported in avoiding the danger of colluding in the reinforcement of patriarchal relations through this work. Resisting the pressures to perform in certain ways may be difficult to achieve because gender-role stereotyping in these situations tends to be subtle and not easily identifiable. It is also unfair that women should be placed in the position of having to deal with such abuses of power. Hence, it is vital that women in such positions have a consultant or supervisor, support groups and networks, all of which can respond to their needs as they define them. This may mean that they have to go outside the formal structures of the workplace if such support networks are absent or cannot be formed within it. Above all, women workers who feel they are being stereotyped or sexually harassed need to know that their concerns will be taken seriously by managers and that they will respond appropriately.

Alternatives are that work should be done with violent men, but it should be undertaken by men with pro-feminist sympathies (Hudson, 1989), and that safeguards should be established to prevent men who work with other men from colluding with each other's sexism. Many of the problems which have to be addressed in working with men, whatever the social work setting, are embedded in the internalization of sexism and patriarchal relations by both men and women. For male workers, working with violent men requires that they acknowledge their own masculinity. This may manifest itself in attempts to control women by colluding in defining women as 'the problem'. They must ensure that they confront men's violent behaviour and compel men to take responsibility for what they do.

The internalization of men's dominant position by women and men means that violent men can escape being challenged when engaging in denial, minimizing, victim blaming and exaggerating their own efforts. To address this range of problems, whoever undertakes the work with violent men will have to encompass a number of different activities which include: development of cognitive behavioural skills, development of relational and reflective skills, and the redefinition of masculinity.

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

Feminist group work

Once it is acknowledged that work should be undertaken with men to confront abusive attitudes and behaviour, feminists' concerns focus on models of intervention. While group work offers opportunities to confront, model and change behaviour, the methodology and philosophy underpinning particular groups have to be examined. There are dangers in adopting any approach which is not sufficiently confrontative in style and feminist in orientation. Men who are abusive will deny, distort or defend their abusive behaviour – unless they are heavily challenged by the group workers and by one another. It is important for aspiring group workers to separate out the underpinning explanations upon which models for work with abusive men are based, the techniques they utilize and the eventual aim they seek to achieve.

The critique of programmes currently running provides an identification of key components of a framework for groups which are necessary to ensure that work with male abusers is carried out along feminist principles. Three types of theory have emerged from the literature as core to current models of intervention: social learning, intra-psychic and socio-political. Some of these do not necessarily achieve the aims of feminist principles.

For example, the limitations of group work based on social learning theory are that to date they do not distinguish between men's protracted, intimidating and escalating sexual abuse and violence, and other violences, including women's resorting to violence; violence is portrayed as a habit which can be modified by techniques (Deschner, 1984). Criticism of abusers' programmes based on an intra-psychic model is that they risk collusion. Dwelling on the past could merely allow abusive men to point to formative experiences outside their control as an excuse to feed into their denial, without ending the violence. For these reasons, Mullender (1996) considers social action as a group work orientation which can support men's efforts to take collective responsibility for violence beyond a sometimes indulgent focus on the self, into female-directed activities to affect the social experiences of women.

Pro-feminist groups

Group work based on the socio-political context facilitates a pro-feminist stance which regards men's abuse and denial, rationalization and justification – of the impact of their behaviour

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

and of their responsibility for it – as endemic in a patriarchal society and as needing to be actively confronted in intervention. In other words, its underpinning theory is socio-cultural, not psychodynamic or behavioural. From this analysis it can be seen that pro-feminism is not a group work model as such, but a set of beliefs and structures which give priority to a feminist understanding and feminist concerns.

Strictly speaking, the Duluth model developed in the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project – the one adopted and adapted most widely by feminists and pro-feminists in the UK – is a hybrid of cognitive behavioural work to achieve individual change, on the one hand, and education to put this into a socio-cultural context, on the other (Pence and Shepard, 1988; see also Pence and Paymer's manual on the approach, 1986). Hence the use of the term 'psycho-educational' for the model. The 'psycho' or counselling aspect uses cognitive behavioural work focused on anger management to teach men to use 'anger logs' to identify their own triggers, together with the internal dialogue or 'self talk' that escalates the incidents, the feelings they have at the time, and the points at which they could behave differently – for example by taking time out from the situation. Although this work is not undertaken without a context, since the concepts of control and dominance are used throughout to explain the purpose and function of abuse, men could learn to avoid physical violence without becoming less psychologically controlling, so it is of limited value in bringing about a change of attitude.

Educational groups focus on male and female social and cultural roles. If it is accepted that abuse stems not from anger but from a belief system wherein men are convinced they have a right to dominate and control, and men force their relationships to become deeply embedded in such assumptions, then that belief system has to be confronted for abusing men. Pence and Shepard recognize that cognitive behavioural anger management and socio-cultural re-education are 'in some ways, contradictory perspectives' (1988: 289) but see them as needing to be combined so that men can both stop being violent and stop believing that women should be compliant.

Pro-feminist re-educational groups make heavy use of the behavioural techniques based on social learning theory, but within a context of insisting that what has been learned can be unlearned by a man who is confronted to accept responsibility for his own actions. In other words, re-educational groups do not work with

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

behaviourism in a deterministic way but with a strong cognitive overlay (i.e. regarding people as aware of what they are doing and able to make choices). These groups also place far more weight on the social context within which men's violence is functional, intentional and purposeful and where it is upheld by the socio-political, economic and cultural context.

Whether or not a group is pro-feminist cannot be ascertained from the gender of the group workers, but is dependent upon the underpinning analysis of male behaviour and the desired outcomes of the intervention. In this context some men's self-help groups run by men's voluntary organizations appear to be insufficiently pro-feminist because they do not hold themselves accountable to women. It might be more accurate to see pro-feminist groups not as a subdivision in methodological terms – since the self-avowed pro-feminists include psychotherapists (Jukes, 1993), cognitive behaviourists, and others – but to see pro-feminism as an essential prerequisite for all group work with abusive men. This prerequisite would include major themes of pro-feminism: accountability, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice, and evaluation.

Accountability to women

Some projects in the UK are framed by men's agendas and there is little attempt made to avoid the risk of collusion with, for example, the men's wish to avoid separation. Accountability means that such work has to be alert to the needs of women, making groups answerable to women for their standards as well as for content and process, and is not dependent upon the organizational framework. In the British context, groups which are rooted in an inter-agency domestic violence structure are more likely to operate along pro-feminist lines, as are those which insist on court-mandated referrals to stress the criminal nature of abuse.

Women's safety If even a proportion of men change as a result of groups, then this will contribute to women's safety. However, there are doubts about the overall efficacy of interventions and if it were to emerge that groups made men more dangerous, or dangerous in different ways – perhaps under a veneer of having changed – then this would give grave cause for concern. The priority for men's programmes should be to ensure women's safety; there should be no automatic assumption that any individual man is 'safe' during or after attendance at a group. This has implications for programmes which involve women to offer support and validation. Contact with women during their partners' membership of a group is essential,

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

not to involve the women in the mechanisms for change but to build in measures for their safety, to give them an objective picture of the group (including its lack of guarantees of success), and to offer them access to support (Morley, 1993).

Increasingly programmes in the UK are establishing parallel services for men and women, offering contact to female partners out of concern for their safety. In one project, when a man is referred to the group, one of the conditions of joining is to give his partner's address and telephone number (if he knows it) to the men's worker who passes it to the Women's Support Service (WSS). The signing of the confidentiality waiver gives the men's worker the right to contact the women's service, who warn the partner if the man's demeanour in the group (or talk of discovery of her whereabouts or of expiry of an injunction, for example) makes him appear a threat. The police will also be contacted if specific threats are voiced. The women's worker informs the woman if her partner fails to attend or is excluded from the group, so that he cannot mislead her, and she is advised that the WSS is still there to support her if required, quite independent of the question of the man's membership of the group.

Wider accountability to women Any men's project should also be accountable to women through a wider structure in which work with women and women's viewpoints are central components. Morley (1993) emphasizes how crucially important it is that there should always be a strong women's voice, representing the perspective of those who work with, and those who have survived, violence, in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of men's programmes.

In the establishment of the former CHANGE project in Scotland, women's perspectives on the past performance of all the relevant legal and welfare agencies, including specific criticisms of the criminal justice system, resulted in an emphasis on the criminality of abusive behaviour, the invocation of legal sanctions and the rejection of pre-trial diversion to the programme where prosecution was difficult. Such an approach runs counter to the argument that criminalizing domestic violence reinforces hegemonic masculinity by exposing men further to manifestations of state violence through the criminal justice system. It can also be criticized for creating tension between accountability to the courts and accountability to women.

It is clear that no agency should launch into establishing a programme for abusers with referrals from the courts without

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

formalizing the links with women's organizations (including black women's organizations), for example through an inter-agency forum and a representative management committee, so that all issues can be debated from the perspective of women's interests. The criminal justice system may have a different agenda. A forum with strong women's membership can also keep men's workers in touch, for example, with the need not to make over-stated claims for what they can achieve and with the imperative of keeping women's safety to the fore.

Accountability of workers Changing a masculinity which is problematic, for example needing to dominate and resorting to violence to do so, requires rethinking the ways in which men's existence is validated and legitimated. Redefining masculinity along less aggressive and more nurturing dimensions obliges men to change their behaviour regarding their relationships with other men so that these become more collaborative, and with women so that relationships between men and women can become more egalitarian (Dominelli and Whitehead, 1994). For men to establish a new basis for relationships amongst men and across the gender divide it is necessary for them to work on themselves individually and in groups. However, focusing exclusively on men who are identified as perpetrating violence is insufficient to achieve the broader social change which is required. It is not just individual men who have to change, society's definition of masculinity also has to become a target for change. Only in this way can the cultural approval of men's right to control others be challenged and reversed.

Anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice

Feminist-inspired groups attempt to avoid any discussion of families of origin as causal factors for men's abusive behaviour, keeping the focus on men's responsibility for their own actions; group members may be offered contacts with counselling services elsewhere to work on other personal issues. Such approaches can be associated with women blaming, and can constitute oppression of women in subtle ways, even if this is unintended.

Equally, intervention in domestic violence by black men can contribute to further oppression. Racial stereotypes of violent black men make their position much more complex than that of white men from the moment an allegation is made through to the point of conviction (Wilson, 1980). Black men have different relationships with state institutions, particularly the police, the criminal

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

justice system and the immigration system, which are deeply implicated in perpetuating injustice against them (Mama, 1989). If imprisoned, racism in the prison setting makes their position much worse (Dominelli et al., 1995).

Racism therefore puts black women who have been beaten by black men in a double bind. Within black communities, considerable pressure is exerted on them not to report assaults to the (white) authorities because doing so could be used by white people to fuel racist stereotypes about violence in black communities, might lead to overly punitive criminal justice responses and might endanger a man's immigration status as well as that of themselves and their children (Mama, 1989). Black women have therefore developed their own facilities for dealing with domestic violence in a more supportive environment (Guru, 1987; Mama, 1989). White people cannot avoid the responsibility of addressing racism within mainstream services by assuming that black women's voluntary initiatives are all that is needed (Dominelli, 1988) and pro-feminist programmes for intervention have to address racism as part of the socio-political context.

Evaluation

Ideally, no new programmes should be set up without evaluation being built in. It is, of course, crucial to know whether violent men can change as a result of intervention because, even if their partners leave, there are frequent reconciliations and abusers often perpetrate violence in a series of relationships (Gondolf, 1987).

One problem with evaluation is that on close examination of group work programmes it becomes quite difficult to define, let alone to measure, success. The issues involved include: confused causal influences within the programme or between the programme and other factors such as criminal justice or relationship events; lack of objectivity in practitioner evaluations; major differences between abuser self-report and partner reports of continuing abuse, or lack of clarity about the source of follow-up reports; the impact on follow-up self-reports of programme membership itself; definitions of abuse confined to violence which may overlook continuing emotional terrorization; lack of control groups; untypicality of programme attenders (lower socio-economic groups are over-represented and minority ethnic groups under-represented) and, doubly, of programme completers; the impact on follow-up statistics of couples separating and reuniting; underfunded and unsystematic evaluation; and follow-up periods which are far too

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

short to measure real success (Eiskovits and Edelson, 1989; Edleson and Brygger, 1986; Chen et al., 1989; Domestic Abuse Project, 1989, 1991; Edleson and Grusznski, 1989; Poynter, 1989; Johnson and Kanzler, 1990).

Many studies do report successes in reducing overt violence. For example, Edleson and Tolman (1992) report a success rate in the region of 53–85 percent. However, evidence is as yet far from firm and success is rarely achieved in giving women a life completely free of the domination and fear imposed by these men. A more sobering finding is that although two-thirds of completers in the Domestic Abuse Project were reported non-violent, most persisted with controlling or threatening behaviour (Edleson and Syers, 1990). This is especially worrying in that women may be more likely to return to men who have at least sought help, even if they have dropped out of the group or failed to respond to it. The danger involved in the lack of guaranteed success is a very strong reason for never setting up a men's project in isolation. It needs to be linked with other services (and social policy changes) which are designed to help women be safe – and to grow in the confidence required to seek safety or outside intervention when necessary.

Conclusion

This article has sought to give a perspective on working with violence within the domestic sphere. In arguing that feminists should consider working with men who have committed acts of abuse, feminist theory has been used as a basis for constructing understandings of male violence which acknowledge the complexities of male experience and the need for caution in assuming that simply working with men without due consideration of the basis for the work and the potential outcomes is not enough.

In giving an overview of existing projects the argument is that work in this area should aim to enable men to learn how to relate to others, namely women, who have rights which must be observed, including the right not to be attacked. The methodologies go beyond anger management approaches to specific domestic violence focus of programmes for men convicted of assaults on women partners. A significant component is the promotion of gender awareness. This requires men to take personal responsibility for their actions in abusing women by neither externalizing their problems nor seeking to blame others. Thus the agenda feminists are placing before men is a social and political agenda which demands

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

they take action individually and collectively. Probation officers and social workers can subscribe to this agenda by ensuring that their work with violent men follows feminist guidelines.

Note

A version of this paper was presented at the IASSW Symposium at the NGO Conference of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995.

References

Brittan, A. (1989) *Masculinity and Power*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Chen, H., C. Bersani, S.C. Myers and R. Denton (1989) 'Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Court Sponsored Abuser Treatment Programme', *Journal of Family Violence* 4(4): 309–22.

Connell, R.W. (1987) *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Daly, M. (1978) *Gyn/Ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Deschner, J. (1984) *The Hitting Habit: Anger Control for Battering Couples*. New York: The Free Press.

Domestic Abuse Project (1989) *Research Update*. Minneapolis, MN: Domestic Abuse Project Inc.

Domestic Abuse Project (1991) *Research Update*. Minneapolis, MN: Domestic Abuse Project Inc.

Dominelli, L. (1988) *Anti-Racist Social Work*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Dominelli, L. (1991) *Women Across Continents: Feminist Social Policy*. Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Dominelli, L. and E. McLeod (1989) *Feminist Social Work*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Dominelli, L. and A. Whitehead (1994) 'Men, Masculinity and Crime', paper presented to the Power seminar, Sheffield University, June.

Dominelli, L., L. Jeffers, G. Jones, S. Sibandan and B. Williams (1995) *Anti-Racist Probation Practice*. Aldershot: Avebury.

Edleson, J.L. and M.P. Brygger (1986) 'Gender Differences in Reporting of Battering Incidences', *Family Relations* 35 (July): 377–82.

Edleson, J.L. and R.J. Grusznski (1989) 'Treating Men who Batter: Four Years of Outcome Data from the Domestic Abuse Project', *Journal of Social Service Research* 12 (1/2): 3–22.

Edleson, J.L. and M. Syers (1990) 'The Relative Effectiveness of Group Treatment for Men who Batter', *Social Work Research and Abstracts* 26: 10–17.

Edleson, J.L. and R.M. Tolman (1992) *Intervention for Men who Batter: an Ecological Approach*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Edwards, A. (1987) 'Male Violence in Feminist Theory: an Analysis of the Changing Conceptions of Sex/Gender Violence and Male Domination', in J. Hanmer and M. Maynard (eds) *Women, Violence and Social Control*. London: Macmillan Press.

Eiskovits, Z.C. and J.L. Edleson (1989) 'Intervening with Men who Batter: a Critical Review of the Literature', *Social Services Review* 63(3): 384–414.

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

Gilligan, C. (1993) *In a Different Voice*. London: Harvard University Press.
Gondolf, E.W. (1987) 'Evaluating Programs for Men who Batter: Problems and Prospects', *Journal of Family Violence* 2(1): 95–108.
Gordon, L. (1989) *Heroes of their own Lives: the Politics and History of Family Violence*. London: Virago.
Guru, S. (1987) 'An Asian Women's Refuge', in S. Ahmed, J. Cheetham and J. Small (eds) *Social Work with Black Children and Their Families*. London: B.T. Batsford.
Hanmer, J. (1977) 'Community Action, Women's Aid and the Women's Liberation Movement', in M. Mayo (ed.) *Women in the Community*. London: Routledge.
Hanmer, J. and D. Statham (1988) *Women and Social Work: Towards Woman Centred Practice*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
Hearn, J. (1987) *The Gender of Oppression: Men, Masculinity and the Critique of Marxism*. Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
Hudson, A. (1989) 'Changing Perspectives: Feminism, Gender and Social Work', in M. Langan (ed.) *Radical Social Work Today*, London: Unwin Hyman.
Johnson, J.M. and D.J. Kanzler (1990) 'Treating Domestic Violence: Evaluating Effectiveness of a Domestic Violence Diversion Program', paper presented to Tenth Annual Symposium on Social Work with Groups, Miami, Florida, October.
Jukes, A. (1993) *Why Men Hate Women*. London: Free Association Books.
Liddle, A.M. (1989) 'Feminist Contributions to an Understanding of Violence against Women: Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back', *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 26(5): 759–75.
Lorde, A. (1984) *Sister Outsider*. New York: Crossing Press.
MacKinnon, C. (1989) *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Mama, A. (1989) *The Hidden Struggle: Statutory and Voluntary Sector Responses to Violence Against Black Women in the Home*. London: London Race and Housing Research Unit.
Messerschmidt, J.W. (1993) *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualization of Theory*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
Morley, R. (1993) 'Recent Responses to Domestic Violence Against Women: a Feminist Critique', in R. Page and J. Baldock (eds) *Social Policy Review*. Canterbury: Social Policy Association.
Mullender, A. (1996) *Rethinking Domestic Violence: The Social Work and Probation Response*. London: Routledge.
Orme, J. (1994) 'Violent Women', in C. Lupton and T. Gillespie (eds) *Working with Violence*. Basingstoke: BASW/Macmillan.
Orme, J. (1998) 'Feminist Social Work', in R. Adams, L. Dominelli and M. Payne (eds) *Social Work: Themes, Issues and Critical Debates*.
Pence, E. and M. Paymer (1986) *Power and Control: Tactics of Men who Batter. An Educational Curriculum*, revised 1990. Duluth, MN: Minnesota Program Development.
Pence, E. and M. Shepard (1988) 'Integrating Feminist Theory and Practice: the Challenge of the Battered Women's Movement', in K. Yllo and M. Bogard (eds) *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Perrott, S. (1994) 'Working with Men Abusers', in C. Lupton and T. Gillespie (eds) *Working with Violence*. Basingstoke: BASW/Macmillan.
Poynter, T.L. (1989) 'An Evaluation of a Group Programme for Male Perpetrators

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011

of Domestic Violence', *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage and Family* 10(3): 133–42.

Segal, L. (1987) *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*. London: Virago.

Segal, L. (1990) *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*. London: Virago.

Stanko, E. (1985) *Intimate Intrusions? Women's Experience of Male Violence*. London: Routledge.

Storr, A. (1968) *Human Aggression*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Wilson, E. (1980) *What is to be Done about Violence Against Women?* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Downloaded from isw.sagepub.com at LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES on April 24, 2011